

Introduction

The document *South Carolina Foreign Languages Curriculum Standards* describes what every student of foreign language should know and be able to do at the end of high school. These standards set high expectations for all students and are intended to raise the level of competence and improve student performance in foreign language study. While the document is written to be as understandable as possible to a wide audience, it is intended to enable education professionals to design and implement effective standards-based curricula for optimum student progress. Students will best achieve these standards through the collaborative efforts of administrators, teachers, and parents, as well as their own initiative.

These curriculum standards are a direct response to the need for more specific instructional guidelines to accompany the *South Carolina Foreign Language Framework*, first adopted in 1993 and revised in 1998. This document is a broad instructional design used by policy makers, instructional leaders, teachers, and communities for continuous improvement of the foreign language educational system. It serves as a common reference point to ensure that all components of the instructional program work together, as we say in the preface to this document, to reinforce the same vision of instructional excellence in South Carolina's classrooms.

A task force of elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary teachers began in 1997 to develop academic curriculum standards that are based on the three premises of the document:

- opportunities for foreign language education for every student,
- foreign language programs that begin in elementary school and continue uninterrupted through high school, and
- instruction in modern foreign languages that is standards-based.

Since the adoption of the framework, three major changes have occurred in foreign language education. First, more and more districts in South Carolina are establishing elementary-school foreign language programs. Second, foreign language was included among the disciplines in the core curriculum in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which was signed into law in 1994. Finally, national foreign language standards have been published and widely endorsed. Due to these changes, the curriculum standards reflect a blend of the state program and the national standards.

As the document states, a quality foreign language program is one that begins in kindergarten and progresses sequentially through grade twelve. The use of the terms *beginning*, *developing*, and *expanding stages* in this document underscores the firm belief that the acquisition of a second language is a long-term process that continues throughout a student's

entire educational experience. Just as no one expects a student to become competent in English, math, science, and social studies in just two years, neither should one expect a student to learn a foreign language in less time than is necessary to develop true proficiency. How much proficiency in a foreign language a student acquires is in direct proportion to the time that he or she spends in an ongoing, articulated program.

Statement of Philosophy

The South Carolina Foreign Language Curriculum Standards Committee endorses the statement of philosophy by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*:

Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and beyond its borders. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English-speaking backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language.

Supporting this vision are three assumptions about language and culture, learners of language and culture, and language and culture education:

Competence in more than one language and culture enables people to

- communicate with other people in other cultures in a variety of settings;
- look beyond their customary borders;
- develop insight into their own language and culture;
- act with greater awareness of self, of other cultures, and of their own relationship to those cultures;
- gain direct access to additional bodies of knowledge; and
- participate more fully in the global community and marketplace.

All students can be successful language and culture learners, and they

- must have access to language and culture study that is integrated into the entire school experience;
- benefit from the development and maintenance of proficiency in more than one language;
- learn in a variety of ways and settings; and
- acquire proficiency at varied rates.

Language and culture education is part of the core curriculum, and it

- is tied to program models that incorporate effective strategies, assessment procedures, and technologies;
- reflects evolving standards at the national, state, and local levels; and
- develops and enhances basic communication skills and higher order thinking skills.

The Standards

The standards for foreign language learning are organized within the five goal areas that make up foreign language education: *Communication*, *Cultures*, *Connections*, *Comparisons*, and *Communities*. None of these goals stands alone; all are interconnected. Each goal area contains two or three content standards; the standards describe the knowledge and abilities all students should acquire by the end of their high school education.

Communication, or communicating in languages other than English, is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature. Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the *cultures* that use those languages; in fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Learning languages provides *connections* to additional bodies of knowledge that are unavailable to monolingual English speakers. Through *comparisons* and contrasts with the language studied, students develop greater insight into their own language and culture and realize that multiple ways of viewing the world exist. Together these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual *communities* at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways. As is apparent, none of these goals can be separated from the others.

This expanded view of language learning offers particular advantages for the teaching of foreign languages to *all* students. Foreign language instruction committed to providing experiences in all five goal areas will be beneficial to all students, regardless of their educational or career aspirations. After leaving school, they will retain for a lifetime the cross-cultural skills and knowledge they have acquired, the insight and the access to a world beyond traditional borders.

In order to attain these standards, students require a foreign language program that provides rich curricular experiences. In the past, classroom instruction was often focused on the memorization of vocabulary words and grammar rules. The standards for foreign language learning require a much broader definition of the content of the foreign language experience. Students should be given ample opportunities to explore, develop, and use communication strategies, learning

strategies, critical thinking skills, and skills in technology, as well as the appropriate elements of the language system and culture.

The language system is a means for attaining the various outcomes described in this document: communicating, gaining cultural understanding, connecting with other disciplines. The language system is also much more than words and rules; it includes the sociolinguistic elements of gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication, styles of discourse, and “learning what to say to whom and when.” These elements form the bridge between language and culture and must be present if students are to learn to interact appropriately in the target language.

Benchmark Stages

The *South Carolina Foreign Languages Curriculum Standards* uses the terms *beginning*, *developing*, and *expanding* to designate the stages of language development. These terms emphasize the fact that language is a complex system and that language skills are developed over a long period of time:

- A student at the *beginning* level is learning basic language skills, regardless of his or her grade level. A student at this level may be in elementary, middle, or high school, depending on the district offerings in foreign language.
- A student at the *developing* level will be able to understand and use short phrases and simple sentences but will still not be considered proficient or fluent in a foreign language with regard to any of the five goals (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities). A student at this level, having benefited from an elementary school foreign language program, may be in middle or high school, depending on the amount of time allotted to foreign language instruction in elementary and middle school.
- A student at the *expanding* level, having benefited from a complete K–12 language experience, will be able to participate in the target language in analytical and higher-level tasks similar to those in other core and elective subjects. This level may include students in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.

Each benchmark stage will incorporate and expand the skills developed in the previous stage.